



Strategic Plan

2024 - 2027



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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the land on which the County of Essex is located is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, Odawa and Potawatomie Peoples.

We specifically recognize Caldwell First Nation and other First Nations which have provided significant historical and contemporary contributions to this region.

We also value the contributions of all Original Peoples of Turtle Island, who have been living and working on this land from time immemorial.

Message From the Warden

You can't get where you're going if you don't have a destination and a way to get there. This Strategic Plan, the first-ever adopted by the County of Essex, provides both.

It envisions a prosperous future for this region — one of responsible growth, affordability, environmental sustainability, and economic diversification — and clearly defines the actions that need to be taken in pursuit of that aspiration. It places an emphasis on improving the quality of life for Essex County residents and delivering exceptional services on which they can rely.

The plan was developed over several months with input from residents, municipal staff, community and business leaders and our Local Municipal Partners. The mayors and deputy mayors from Amherstburg, Essex, Kingsville, Lakeshore, LaSalle, Leamington, and Tecumseh engaged in robust and thoughtful discussions over multiple meetings to create this shared vision for the future of our great and growing region.

We talked about the challenges facing the County along with our historic strengths. We crafted a plan that would help us to not only manage the incredible growth coming our way but harness its potential, creating jobs and increasing our housing supply while preserving farmland, greenspace, and the quality of life we hold so dear.

We agreed on a new Vision Statement for the County of Essex, which has been providing solid governance in this region for more than two centuries: "The County of Essex strives to be a regional champion and trusted partner in delivering services for the success of our local communities and our residents."

This Vision Statement articulates the dual nature of the County, an upper-tier municipality that provides exceptional regional services and promotes regional interests while also supporting the progress and prosperity of seven unique and independent local municipalities. We are strong alone but stronger when we work together.

The Strategic Plan is built around three strategic goals and underneath each of those goals are strategic directions and initiatives. The three goals are:

- Working as Team Essex County
- Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence
- Building a Regional Powerhouse

Essex County Council is committed to focusing on the initiatives underpinning these strategic goals and can use this Strategic Plan to help guide its decision-making over this term of Council and beyond. This region has a proud history and so much promise for a prosperous future. This plan will keep us on track and on target as we work together to maximize that potential for the benefit of all.



Hilda MacDonald
Warden

Message From the CAO

The County of Essex provides such a diverse range of services that it has historically been difficult to articulate a cohesive vision of who we are and what we do.

We maintain a road network of more than 1,500 km, we oversee a regional ambulance service, we own and operate a long-term care home, we fund a library service along with supportive housing and a homelessness hub, and we are jointly responsible for garbage and recycling services. Our employees are experts in their fields, from accountants and engineers to nurses and paramedics to administrators and librarians to social workers, snow plow operators, and more.

We do it all and we do it well. This new Strategic Plan, the first-ever for the County of Essex, provides us with unifying Vision and Mission Statements and a set of corporate values to which we can all aspire. It was crafted with considerable feedback from County of Essex employees, who participated in surveys and focus groups, and it will help us to continue delivering exceptional services while remaining focused on the priorities set by our elected representatives.

As County of Essex employees, we will strive to be accountable, equitable, and inclusive and we will embrace teamwork and service excellence while championing the interests of our region. We will continue to work collaboratively with our municipal partners and make informed, evidence-based decisions. We have close relationships with our peers in local municipalities and we will continue to support them.

Staff will work to achieve the priorities established by Council in this Strategic Plan and we will use it to guide our day-to-day work and inform our budgets, policies, operational plans, and recommendations. We will continue to build out additional initiatives as well as performance metrics so we can measure our progress and consider course corrections.

This document is not meant to sit on a shelf. It is meant to inspire and inform and it is designed to be used so that decisions are made and budgets built with an eye toward realizing the vision of equity and prosperity articulated by Council. It will be a living document as well, one that is updated regularly in response to changing circumstances in our dynamic and growing region.

I would like to thank the residents of Essex County and staff for the input they provided into this Strategic Plan and I would like to thank Essex County Council for empowering staff with a list of priorities along with the resources and support to achieve them.

You have shown us where we need to go and we are ready to move forward. We are Team Essex County and together we will prosper and maximize the opportunities before us.



Sandra Zwiers
Chief Administrative Officer



About Essex County

Essex County is bounded on three sides by water – Lake Erie, the Detroit River, and Lake St. Clair. We are Ontario’s warmest county, blessed with rich soil and farmers who know how to work it. We offer residents an attractive and affordable quality of life with a mix of rural and urban living, easy access to big city amenities, and a wide range of employment and educational opportunities.

The commutes are short in Essex County and the summers long. Residents enjoy an abundance of recreational opportunities, from golfing and fishing to boating, birding, and biking, all within a few minutes from their home or workplace. We have historic sites, wineries, breweries, and museums, and an ever-expanding network of trails winding past fertile fields and stretches of coastline with spectacular views. Our sunsets just can’t be beat.

We have long been one of Canada’s best-kept secrets but word is getting out.

Our population was 192,700 in the 2021 census and we are poised for explosive growth. Our population is expected to increase by as many as 3,900 residents a year, more than double the average of the previous 15 years, and could reach 315,000 within the next three decades. The number of jobs is likewise expected to grow, from 72,000 to as many as 124,000 by 2051.

The County needs to manage that growth smartly to maximize our economic opportunities while preserving our commitment to the environment and the quality of life issues that make our region such an attractive place to live and visit. This Strategic Plan will help us do that, keeping staff and Council focused on the collective vision we share for a prosperous future.

Tourism has long been a driver of our regional economy along with the agri-food sector. More than 80 per cent of Essex County is farmland and we are home to the largest and most intensive greenhouse cluster in Canada. We need to preserve these foundational industries while pursuing continued economic diversification.

We have a proud history of agricultural and manufacturing excellence, bolstered by a skilled workforce, an enviable location at the nexus of the North American economy and a track record of innovation and ingenuity. We need to build on these strengths and maximize the economic potential of generational investments like the new Gordie Howe Bridge and NextStar battery plant.

For more than 225 years, the County of Essex has been providing exceptional service and solid governance to the residents of southwestern Ontario. We are comprised of seven diverse and dynamic municipalities, each blessed with their own unique identities and history. They are all strong in their own right but we are stronger when we work together, championing the interests of this region and collaborating in the best interests of the residents we serve.

Introducing Our Strategic Plan

Strategic planning is a future-oriented process to help an organization manage change and make informed decisions. Strategic plans establish a forward-looking vision for an organization and create clear accountabilities for achieving this vision. Good strategic plans highlight who organizations exist to serve, what they do, and why they do it.

The County has created its first-ever Strategic Plan to provide a clear path forward for how the organization will create value for its partners, local communities, and residents over the coming years. The County's Strategic Plan will connect staff's day-to-day work to the County's overall strategic direction, and inform organizational strategies, initiatives, and budgets. The Strategic Plan will create a strong foundation for collaborative relationships within County Council, between County Council and staff, and between the County and its partners and local communities.

County staff are responsible for "owning" the Strategic Plan and will regularly update County Council and the broader community regarding progress implementing the Plan. Council and staff will review the Plan on an ongoing basis to ensure it responds to changes within the County's broader environment and emerging community priorities.

The Strategic Plan Creation Process

The County's strategic planning process was initiated in Spring 2023. Through its strategic planning process, County Council sought to respond to the significant changes the County is experiencing and position the County for continued success.

It was important to the County that its partners, local communities, and residents were broadly engaged in the strategic planning process, and that the process was evidence informed. As such, Strategic Plan inputs were gathered through several activities, such as:

- Interviews and workshops with County Councillors and Senior Leadership Team members;
- Focus groups with County staff;
- A County Staff Survey;
- Community events throughout the County;
- A Community Survey;
- Interviews with the County's Local Municipal Partners and external stakeholders; and
- Desktop research.



What We Heard...

Included below are some of the themes we heard through our engagement with County Councillors, Senior Leadership Team members, staff, partners, and residents.

The County of Essex delivers excellent services: Generally, the County's individual departments are viewed as having strong leadership that independently drive high quality service delivery and robust planning for their various departments. Major resident-facing services include emergency medical services, long-term care, planning and infrastructure services, and the County's library system.

The County is well positioned to tackle the opportunities and challenges ahead: Over the past few years, the County has effectively managed significant turnover within the administration's Senior Leadership Team and within the broader organization (e.g., due to several prominent retirements). While the County and its stakeholders recognize that work is needed to support a strong and resilient County workforce and organizational culture, County Council, senior leadership, and staff are optimistic about the future and confident that the County is well positioned to meet new challenges and opportunities. The County boasts a healthy financial position that has allowed it to build strong reserves and fund capital projects without taking on debt.

Regional partnerships are highly valued: County leadership and staff are proud of ongoing collaboration with the City of Windsor (e.g., regarding emergency medical services and supportive housing) and with Local Municipal Partners to deliver shared services for the region. This cooperation extends to several arms-length organizations established and funded by the City of Windsor and the County to advance specific regional priorities, including Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, Invest WindsorEssex, and Workforce WindsorEssex, among others. There is a general desire to strengthen communication channels and collaboration between the County, the City of Windsor, and Local Municipal Partners. Many would like to see the County assume an elevated leadership role at the regional level in managing or delivering services and in shaping the region through more proactive advocacy.

Many of the County's challenges are not unique: Municipalities across Ontario - and their residents - are facing many of the same challenges as the County, such as inflation and economic pressures, a highly competitive labour market, a rapidly changing provincial legislative and policy framework, climate change and increasing extreme weather events, and housing affordability. Both upper and lower-tier municipalities are facing pressure from residents and other levels of government to take on more responsibility for services that have historically been beyond the scope of local governments, like healthcare.

The County is expecting massive growth and development: The Windsor-Essex region is anticipating substantial growth over the next few decades. Projects including the Gordie Howe International Bridge, the NextStar Energy e-battery plant, the retooling of Stellantis' Windsor Assembly Plant, and the new Windsor Regional Hospital, coupled with spin-off industries, population growth, and other provincial and federal initiatives, are expected to create significant opportunities for the County. Economic development and population growth will help the County grow municipal revenues to improve service levels, leverage economies of scale in service delivery, and expand service options.





The County is facing increasing service delivery expectations: Significant growth and development are expected to strain the County’s existing infrastructure capacity, reinforcing the importance of maintaining existing assets and requiring additional investment in new infrastructure. Population growth across the County is contributing to an overall rise in service level expectations. Residents leaving urban centres and moving to smaller County communities with comparatively affordable housing options and a perceived improved quality of life also bring with them urban service delivery expectations. The overall balance of service needs across the County is also shifting. More and more service needs that had previously been considered “urban” or confined to the City core (e.g., homelessness) are becoming more prevalent and visible in communities across the County. These shifting and growing demands present opportunities to improve County-wide service levels and reduce the overall cost of service delivery for residents across the County.

Clear direction will support County Council, staff, and partners in advancing shared priorities: The County’s Strategic Plan is seen as an important opportunity for the County to enhance unity and collaboration between Council and between Council and staff, as all work towards a collective vision. Clear alignment and understanding among Council and staff regarding the County’s vision and priorities will help Council and leadership effectively guide the organization through key decisions, such as how to best plan for growth and what the role of the County should be for the broader region.



This Strategic Plan Includes the Following Key Elements:

The vision, mission, and values are the expression of how the County works to create value for its partners, local communities, and residents.

The **Vision Statement** is the County government's long-term promise to its partners, local communities, and residents.

The **Mission Statement** communicates how the County works day-to-day to deliver on its promise to its partners, local communities, and residents.

Values are what shape the organization's culture, decision-making, and accountability.

The strategic goals and directions set the organization's direction and establish its priorities. They define what success will look like for the County and the activities that will make this vision a reality.

Strategic goals set the areas of strategic focus for the organization.

Strategic directions are the tangible objectives that will be resourced and prioritized to achieve the strategic goals.



OUR STRATEGIC PLAN AT A GLANCE

VISION

The County of Essex strives to be a regional champion and trusted partner in delivering services for the success of our local communities and residents.

MISSION

Through meaningful partnerships, strong advocacy, and informed decision-making we deliver fair and valuable regional programs and services for our communities.

VALUES

Accountability

We recognize that trust is a privilege and are dedicated to acting transparently and with integrity in our service delivery.

Inclusion

We strive to create a government that is welcoming, respectful, and accessible to everyone.

Teamwork

We respect each team member's unique skills and contributions, share openly, and make decisions collaboratively.

Equity

We are fair in how we fund and deliver services.

Champion

We advocate enthusiastically for the interests and wellbeing of our County.

Service Excellence

We work to provide services to our stakeholders that are high quality, reliable, and continuously improving.

STRATEGIC GOALS AND DIRECTIONS

Working as Team Essex County:

The County will empower staff and be an essential team player in driving shared priorities with Local Municipal Partners.

- Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation.
- Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results.
- Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share.

Growing as Leaders in Public

Service Excellence: The County will be a recognized leader in regional governance and a trusted provider of quality public services.

- Being an Employer with Impact.
- A Government Working for the People.
- Promoting Transparency and Awareness.

Building a Regional Powerhouse:

The County will help create the conditions to make the region a powerhouse in public and private investment attraction.

- Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners.
- Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County.
- Harmonizing Action for Growth.
- Advancing Truth and Reconciliation.

VISION

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Strategic Goals & Directions

GOAL 1

Working as Team Essex County

The County will empower staff and be an essential team player in driving shared priorities with Local Municipal Partners.

Strategic Directions

- 1 | Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation.
- 2 | Focusing “Team Essex County” for Results.
- 3 | Advocating for Essex County’s Fair Share.



Goal 1 | Working as Team Essex County

Objective: The County will empower staff and be an essential team player in driving shared priorities with Local Municipal Partners.

Strategic Directions

1 | Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation: Explore and pursue collaborative shared service models for the County and Local Municipal Partners to enhance service levels, create efficiencies, and improve resident experience.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Establish principles for regional shared service delivery in collaboration with County Council, the County's Senior Leadership Team, and Local Municipal Partners.
 - Continue to explore collaborative planning and purchasing opportunities.
 - Review and evaluate high priority existing shared services and shared service agreements.
-

2 | Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results: Convene Local Municipal Partners and regional stakeholders to foster a "Team Essex County" environment and support the advancement of shared strategic priorities.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Continue to facilitate and formalize regional functional groups among County and Local Municipal Partner staff and leadership.
 - Formally integrate the County's Strategic Plan into County-wide decision-making structures and processes.
 - Improve communication and education for Local Municipal Partners on existing or available County services.
-

3 | Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share: Lead efforts to advance shared regional interests with other municipalities and provincial and federal governments.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Develop and execute a coordinated advocacy strategy to advance common priorities with Local Municipal Partners.
- Continue to support and empower staff to participate in industry associations, boards, and committees at the regional, provincial, and national level.

Strategic Goals & Directions

GOAL 2

Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence

The County will be a recognized leader in regional governance and a trusted provider of quality public services.

Strategic Directions

- 4 | Being an Employer with Impact.
- 5 | A Government Working for the People.
- 6 | Promoting Transparency and Awareness.



Goal 2 | Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence

Objective: The County will be a recognized leader in regional governance and a trusted provider of quality public services.

Strategic Directions

4 | Being an Employer with Impact: Drive greater inter-departmental collaboration, foster positive employee experiences, and improve the recruitment and retention of high-quality talent at the County.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Design and implement a People and Culture Strategy that enhances the County's approach to strategic talent management across the employee lifecycle (from recruitment to succession).
 - Develop and implement a structure for building inter-departmental information sharing and collaboration amongst management staff.
 - Continue to implement, seek feedback, and refine employee appreciation and recognition programs.
-

5 | A Government Working for the People: Elevate Essex County Council's collaboration and decision-making capabilities and capacity.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Develop and implement ongoing governance education and professional development programming and learning resources for Council.
 - Review and update delegation of authority by-law to streamline decision-making.
 - Develop, implement, and communicate (through public reporting) a performance management framework for the County and its departments to support data-informed strategic and business planning and decision-making.
-

6 | Promoting Transparency and Awareness: Establish a strong identity for the County government and elevate awareness of County services and standards to Local Municipal Partners and County residents.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Develop and implement a Stakeholder Communications and Engagement Master Plan to guide the County's proactive and responsive communications with the public, Local Municipal Partners, and other partners.

Strategic Goals & Directions

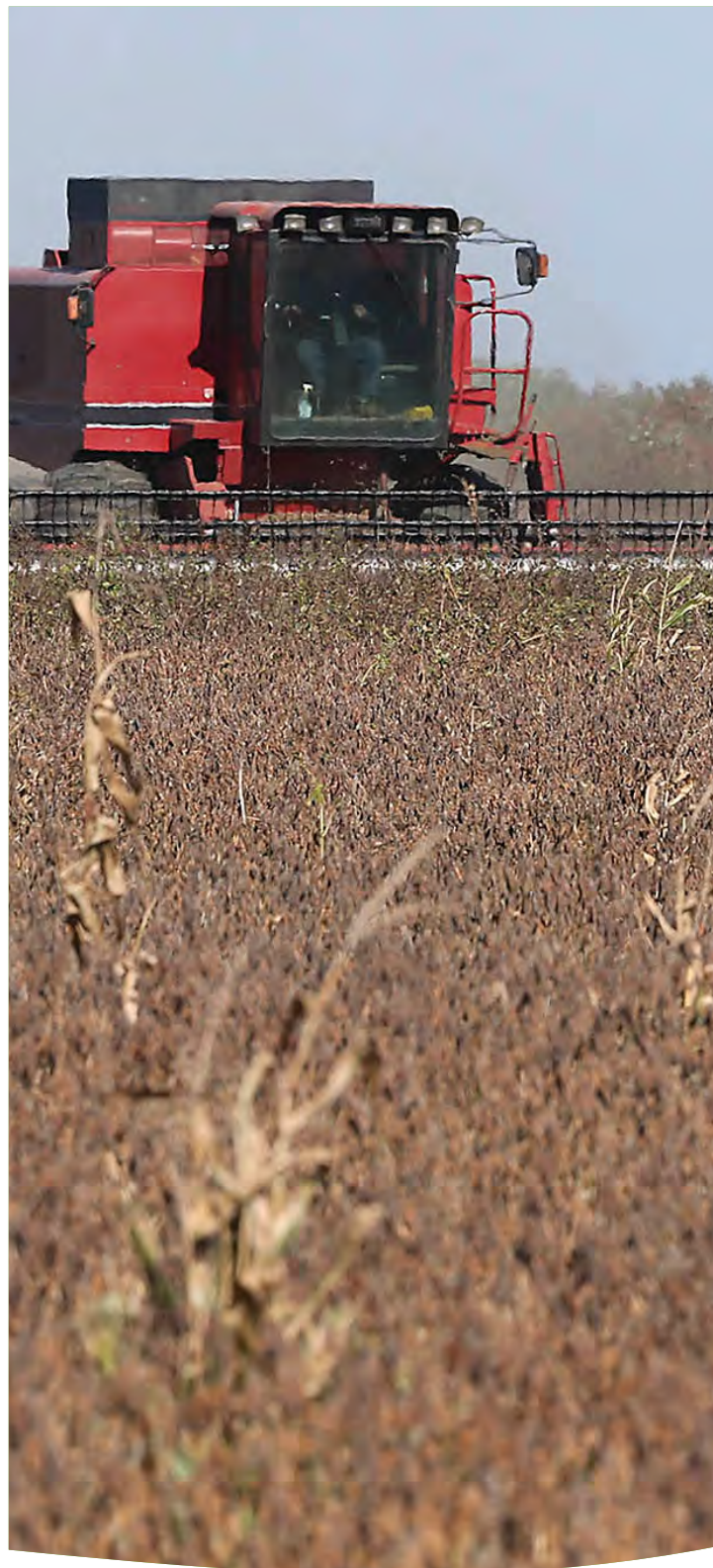
GOAL 3

Building a Regional Powerhouse

The County will help create the conditions to make the region a powerhouse in public and private investment attraction.

Strategic Directions

- 7 | Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners.
- 8 | Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County.
- 9 | Harmonizing Action for Growth.
- 10 | Advancing Truth and Reconciliation.



Goal 3 | Building a Regional Powerhouse

Objective: The County will help create the conditions to make the region a powerhouse in public and private investment attraction.

Strategic Directions

7 | Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners: Maintain existing and expand critical economic and community infrastructure.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Explore sustainable funding and financing options for long-term infrastructure planning including the introduction of development charges to fund growth infrastructure.
 - Assess and right-size the County's internal asset management capacity and capabilities in relation to its existing and anticipated asset portfolio and legislative requirements.
 - Conduct a needs assessment and feasibility study for the future of the Sun Parlor Long Term Care Home.
-

8 | Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County: Ensure that the County's community improvement planning approach continues to meet current and emerging economic and community development needs.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Develop a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to support investment in heavy industrial development in the County.
 - Evaluate opportunities to expand County CIPs to include commercial and residential lands and development.
 - Explore approaches to land purchasing and banking to support medium- and long-term and targeted economic investment and development.
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9 | Harmonizing Action for Growth: Reduce barriers and costs for needed development across the County.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Review and update the County's Official Plan.
 - Work with Local Municipal Partners to harmonize planning and development policies, procedures, and fees.
 - Develop and implement a regional affordable and attainable housing strategy.
-

10 | Advancing Truth and Reconciliation: The County aspires to be an engaged, collaborative, and supportive partner to Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) communities and peoples guided by the principles of Truth and Reconciliation.

To achieve this, the County will:

- Work to build relationships with Indigenous governments and peoples through an ongoing dialogue and consultation on matters of shared interest.



THANKS FOR VISITING



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